

## CAPTAIN DUCK.

BY JOAQUIN MILLER.



"TIM FORGOT THAT HE HAD FALLEN ASLEEP ON THE WARM FLAT ROCK THAT COOL AUTUMN DAY."

CAPTAIN DUCK was a Modoc Indian, with the shortest possible legs. His legs were so short that when he walked he waddled along like a very fat duck. And that is why he was called Captain Duck at the stage station, which was at the foot of the great white mountain in the heart of the Modoc country, Mount Shasta. Some said his legs had been shot off in a battle. And then some said his

legs had been eaten off by a bear. But I do not very well see how that could be ; for his feet were there, all right. And very big feet they were, too ; wide and big and flat like ducks' feet. So I think he must have been born that way.

Poor Captain Duck could not hunt very well, or go on the war-path with the other Indians, and so he came to the stage station, to hire out, with

the few rough men who kept the old log fort and took care of the stage horses there.

These men did not like the old Indian, but as they were a lazy set, they were glad to have him at the fort to rub down and water the stage horses when the sun was hot or there was frost in the air. But they made all sorts of sport of the poor Indian. And, indeed, they laughed at him so much, and made so much fun of his short legs and big feet, that he often wished he was dead. For he was very sad and sensitive.

One day, Big Dan the stage driver left at the station a little boy whose father had died; for the boy had no money to pay fare further. The rough, lazy men there put him to work with the Indian, and they named him "Limber Tim," because he was so slim and limber. And then they did not know his name. But I suppose that would have made no difference, anyway; for, in the mountains of California, they name folks just what they please. And if a boy looks as if his name ought to be "Limber Tim," or "Timber Slim," or anything of that sort, why that must be his name and he can't help it.

The little orphan boy was sent out every day with the short-legged Indian, up on the side of the mountain, to herd the stage horses and keep guard over them. He had a belt, and a pistol in it, and a bowie-knife; and also a gun to carry on his shoulder.

Pretty soon he came to like this very much and began to grow like a weed and get fat. He and the Indian were the best friends in the world. But the men of the station, somehow, were harder and harsher than ever.

But Captain Duck and the boy did not mind it so very much now, for each had a friend,—a friend in the other.

They would buckle on their pistols as soon as it was daylight and they had had a little breakfast of crackers and broiled bear-meat or venison, and, each mounting a horse and driving the others, they would go up on the mountain-side, and there, by a little grove of thick wood, they would stop and let them graze all day. Sometimes Limber Tim would go to sleep on a warm flat rock, while he was supposed to stand guard and look away to the right and to the left for Indians on the war-path. But Captain Duck would never betray him.

Every time that Big Dan the stage driver came by, he would make all sort of fun of Captain Duck, as he hobbled about and hitched up the four stage horses, while the driver sat high up in the box and snapped his long whip.

The Indian did not like Big Dan, and Big Dan did not like the Indian. Dan said the Indian was a spy, and told the men at the stage station that

some night Captain Duck would set fire to the place and run away by the light of the blaze.

One hot day, as he sat on the box with the four lines in his hand all ready to start off at a gallop down the great mountain, he told the Indian, with an oath, to "waddle in on his duck legs" and get him a drink.

The Indian did not move. Then Dan struck him with his whip. The men standing around roared with laughter. Still the sad-faced cripple did not move. Then Dan struck him another cut, across the face.

The Indian's brow grew dark and terrible, but he did not stir. Some one else brought the drink, and then, the driver snapping his whip, the stage dashed away down the mountain and left the Indian standing there, with the boy tenderly wiping his friend's bleeding face and speaking kind and pitiful words to him. The two friends went up on the mountain-side by the little pine grove, and watched the horses as before, and the Indian never spoke at all of what had happened.

A month or two went by, and everybody forgot about the trouble between Big Dan and the sad-faced savage. Everybody, did I say?

One day the stage came thundering in with Big Dan the driver leaning forward helpless on the box. There had been a shot fired from the thick wood back upon the mountain-side. The man was dying, and the four reins were slipping through his helpless hands.

Who could have fired that shot? When the stage driver was dead and buried, some of the men took Limber Tim aside and asked him whether he had been all the time with Captain Duck the day the shot was fired.

"All the time, every minute, every second," answered the lad, earnestly. For he had no suspicion at all that Captain Duck had shot the stage driver. Indeed, the boy believed what he said, and would have maintained it at any hazard. He forgot that he had fallen asleep on the warm flat rock that cool autumn day.

The next summer, signal-fires were seen one night on the mountain-tops. The men at the stage station hastened to fasten the old log fort. For this, they knew, meant war. The Modocs were on the war-path.

The men made their guns ready, and gave Limber Tim an extra pistol to put in his belt, so that he might fight with all his might and help save their lives. But when they came to look for Captain Duck, next morning, he was gone. He had joined the Indians.

Then the men at the stage station were very much afraid; for they had been very cruel, not only to the cripple but to all the Indians, and they

knew that if they fell into their enemies' hands they had no right to expect any mercy at all.

The next night the Indians set the woods on fire, and all the land was dark with smoke. The great pine-trees were falling across the road, and no soldiers, nor anybody, could come to help the

The smoke was so dark and thick that the men were almost choked. They could not see to shoot the Indians, for it was like night.

"What can we do?" cried the men shut up in the fort, and hiding their eyes from the smoke. "The Indians will not come near enough for us to



"THEY HURRIED THE BOY THROUGH THE GREAT WOODEN GATE OF THE FORT, AS HE TIED A WHITE TOWEL ON A RAMROD AND HELD IT HIGH OVER HIS HEAD IN THE THICK SMOKE."

men shut up in the little log fort, and surrounded by the blazing forests.

The men looked one another in the face as the air grew dark and dense from the smoke, and shook their heads sadly — for they believed their time to die had come.

About ten o'clock one morning, the Indians appeared behind the stables and began to fire on the fort. They took the horses out, mounted them, and then set fire to the stables.

And now there was little hope, for the flames would spread to the fort, and then all must perish.

see them and fight. If we go out to find them we shall be shot down from behind the rocks and trees, and not one of us will live to tell the tale."

"Let me go out!" said little Limber Tim. "If I can find Captain Duck, I will save you all."

They hurried the boy through the great wooden gate of the fort, as he tied a white towel on a ramrod and held it high over his head in the thick smoke. Then the men bolted the great gate and left the brave little fellow to do his best with his white flag.

By and by, the boy with the white flag on the



ramrod came pounding at the gate, and the men gathered around wild and eager as they opened it.

"What luck? What hope?"

"Well, if you will all leave your guns and go out one at a time down the stage road and never come back here any more, you can go."

"Never come back here any more?" cried one man, as he jumped toward the gate; "catch me comin' back here any more, if I ever get out of this!" and he leaped out through that gate like a newly sheared sheep leaping over the bars.

Then another followed and another, all feeling very much ashamed of the way they had treated the boy. But somehow they did not have the manhood to hold up their heads and say so.

When the men had gone, glad to go and never thinking of looking back or ever returning to the Modoc country, Captain Duck came hobbling in. The Indians helped Tim to put out the fire and then went away, taking all the stage horses and guns and blankets with them. So when the soldiers came, three days after, they found only these two in charge of the fort,—little Limber Tim and Captain Duck.

The government left some soldiers there after

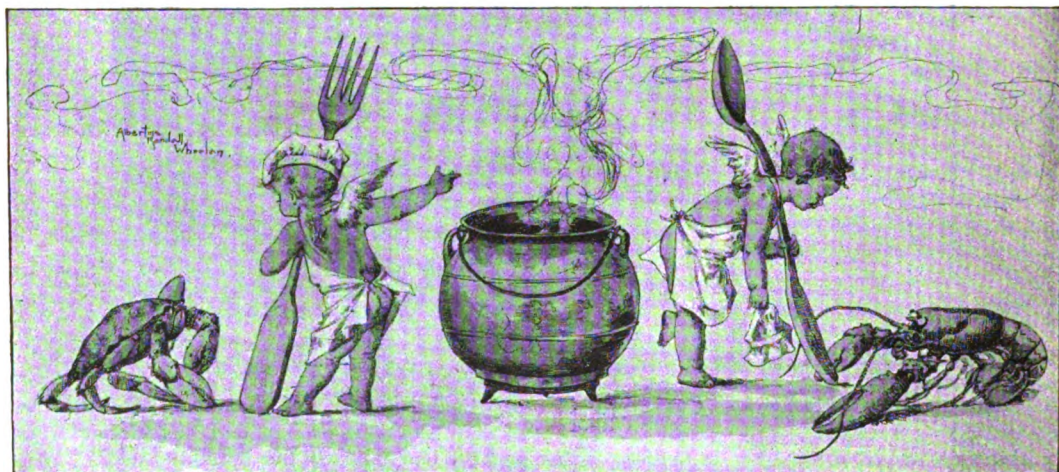
that, and Limber Tim was made station-master by the stage company!

He was the youngest station-master, I suppose, that ever was on the border.

When I passed by there, last year, on a visit to my parents in Oregon, I saw him once more. But he is a man now. He has long hair, a small, black mustache, and wears two pistols in his belt; for the frontier ways prevail in that country still.

As for poor Captain Duck, he is shorter in the legs than ever, I think. His face is deeply wrinkled now, and his long black hair has turned as white as are the shining snows of mighty Mount Shasta when seen against the cold, blue sky above. He never speaks to any one. But he loves Limber Tim with all his heart, and never is long away from his side nor out of his sight if he can help it.

Captain Duck was sitting in the chimney-corner by the great log fire, smoking his pipe, when I saw him last. He was looking straight into the fire,—thinking, thinking. And what was he thinking about? Maybe he was thinking about the dead stage driver who had struck him with a whip. It may be so. It may be so.



### AN INVITATION.

"OH, come, Mr. Lobster, and bring Mr. Crab,  
We've brought you a beautiful dye.  
It will change both those dull unæsthetic cos-  
tumes  
To a hue that will charm every eye!"

"Very kind, we are sure!" said the Lobster and  
Crab,  
"But we don't care to die,—it's our loss:  
We'd rather be dressed in our every-day clothes  
Than in scarlet, with Mayonnaise sauce!"